

Regular Stakes Doubles as Kosovo Train-up

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IDAR OBERSTEIN - Each year, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment runs a high-stakes competition to determine who has bragging rights as the best rifle squad in the battalion.

Nine squads took part in this year's event, known as Regular Stakes, in which the stakes are anything but regular.

Regular Stakes is a competition among the rifle squads that measures the ability of squad leaders and team leaders to lead their soldiers.

The competition is called "Regular" because the soldiers of 1-6 Infantry are "Regulars by God," and "stakes" because of its competitive nature.

When it was all over, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon from Company A, 1-6 Infantry was selected as the top squad in the battalion.

This year, the competition doubled as "train-up" for 1-6 Infantry's upcoming deployment to Kosovo.

It all began with the Army Physical Fitness Test at "0 dark 30", and then it was off to the obstacle course where each squad teamed up to complete 17 stations as one unit.

Weapon disassembly and reassembly and weapon qualification followed. After that, they faced a 12-mile foot march under modestly warm conditions. A brief break after the march to rehydrate, count foot blisters and sores, and it was off to the various hands-on activities.

There, they conducted tasks similar to those performed for Common Task Training and Expert Infantry Badge qualification, but it wasn't over. The weary and dusty soldiers ended the day with a written exam that gauged their mental ability and concentration.

After piling into Black Hawk helicopters at the Idar-Oberstein Airport the following day, the nine squads were flown to their objectives southwest of Baumholder near St. Wendel, where they



Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment negotiate the weave during the obstacle course portion of the Regular Stakes competition.

completed the tactical portion of the competition. Under the watchful eye of the land owners who agreed to allow 1-6 Infantry to use their land, they performed tactical tasks ranging from a raid to issuing an operation order.

One by one, the squads completed their objective and radioed the choppers for extraction from the site.

The blast from the Black Hawk rotors flattened the knee high grass as they approached the landing site and quickly settled on the ground.

The soldiers scurried on board, and within seconds, each squad was whisked back to Idar-Oberstein.

"We set the objectives up pretty close to what they might encounter in Kosovo," said Command Sgt. Maj. William Gunter, 1-6th Infantry.

The objectives were set up on private property to increase the realism of the tasks they needed to accomplish. But the 501st Aviation Battalion did not just fly in and drop soldiers off.

Much preparation went into setting up these scenarios that put soldiers on the ground for about 30 minutes.

"We did a lot of work on this with

the St. Wendel county commissioner, the mayor, range control and the land owners," said Staff Sgt. Cash Freeman, 1-6 Infantry operations NCO. "They've all helped us extensively to pull this off."

Gunter echoed Freeman's words and added, "This exercise accomplished three things. The scenarios in the tactical portion are similar to what they may face when they deploy to Kosovo in December, so it provides soldiers with the training they need to accomplish their mission. The competition aspect of this exercise helps determine the readiness of the men and, of course, we select the best squad in the battalion based on the results. The air support we received from the 501st Aviation Battalion helps the pilots and crew members prepare for their upcoming deployment to Kosovo."

Gunter summed up the exercise with, "All the training the soldiers receive here, in Grafenwoehr, and after Grafenwoehr will start coming together so they'll be a well-honed and well-oiled machine by the time they go into the Balkans."